

PRESIDENT OBAMA DECLARES OCTOBER NATIONAL YOUTH JUSTICE AWARENESS MONTH, NOTES THAT TWO STATES PROSECUTE 16-YEAR-OLDS AS ADULTS

Coalition Points Out Need for New York State to Raise the Age

President Obama today issued a proclamation declaring October “National Youth Justice Awareness” month. In it, he recognizes what the Children’s Defense Fund-New York, Citizens’ Committee for Children and a broad coalition of New Yorkers know to be true: “Involvement in the justice system -- even as a minor, and even if it does not result in a finding of guilt, delinquency, or conviction -- can significantly impede a person's ability to pursue a higher education, obtain a loan, find employment, or secure quality housing.... These children are our Nation's future -- yet most of them were afforded no margin of error after making a mistake.”

President Obama points out that “Nine States prosecute all 17-year-olds as adults regardless of the crime committed, including two States that do the same for 16-year-olds.”

“Shamefully, New York is one of the two states (North Carolina being the other), that automatically treat 16 and 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system,” said Melanie Hartzog, Executive Director of the Children’s Defense Fund-New York and Jennifer March, Executive Director of Citizens’ Committee for Children. “The safety of our communities, as well as the well-being of children hurt by our criminal justice system depend, upon the swift enactment of comprehensive youth justice reform that treats children appropriately.”

While Governor Cuomo included funding and a framework to Raise the Age in his executive budget –and included it as a legislative priority this past year – the legislature did not pass legislation at the end of the 2015 session. New York has failed to recognize what research and science have confirmed: adolescents are children, and prosecuting and placing them in the adult criminal justice system doesn’t work for them and doesn’t work for public safety.

Raising the Age results in better outcomes for youth:

- Studies show that youth in adult prisons are twice as likely to report being beaten by staff, and nearly 50% more likely to be attacked with a weapon than children placed in youth facilities
- Youth in adult prisons face the highest risk of sexual assault
- Youth in adult prisons are often placed in isolation. The isolation young people face in adult facilities is destructive to their mental health and can cause irreparable harm.

- Youth are 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult facility than in a juvenile facility.

Raising the age results in safer communities:

- Studies have found that young people transferred to the adult criminal justice system have approximately 34% more re-arrests for felony crimes than youth retained in the youth justice system.
- Around 80% of youth released from adult prisons reoffend often going on to commit more serious crimes.
- A study comparing New York youth to young people in New Jersey who had committed similar felonies but were treated in different systems, found that the New York youth were more likely to recidivate. New York youth had higher re-arrest rates, higher re-incarceration rates, and a shorter time period to re-arrest than their New Jersey peers.

It's time to Raise the Age, New York.

###

The Children's Defense Fund-New York and Citizens' Committee for Children lead the Raise the Age-New York campaign.

To read President Obama's Proclamation click [here](#).

To learn more about Raise the Age click [here](#).

- See more at: <http://www.cdfny.org/newsroom/press-releases/president-obama-declares.html#sthash.YM53vTbo.dpuf>